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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to (1) determine the level of burnout, job satisfaction, personal strain, occupational stress, and personal coping resources of associate directors, assistant directors, and district supervisors of the Cooperative Extension Service in the North Central Region; (2) determine the extent of association between burnout and personal characteristics, job satisfaction, personal strain, occupational stress, and personal coping; and (3) determine if differences in levels of burnout existed among associate directors, assistant directors, and district supervisors. The population for the study consisted of 19 associate directors, 36 assistant directors, and 67 district supervisors in the Cooperative Extension Service located in the North Central Region who answered mailed questionnaires. Some of the findings and conclusions of the study are the following: (1) administrators/mid-managers who experienced higher levels of occupational stress tended to have higher levels of personal strain, whereas those who had high usage of personal coping strategies tended to have lower levels of stress and strain and ultimately less burnout; (2) approximately one-fifth of the administrators/mid-managers experienced high levels of burnout, and district supervisors and assistant directors had approximately the same level of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization; (3) approximately one-third of the associate directors scored high in the depersonalization category of burnout; (4) demographic variables had little relationship to the level of burnout; (5) the majority of administrators were satisfied with their jobs; and (6) the majority of administrators had low levels of occupational stress, although assistant directors had the most role overload. Recommendations were made to conduct workshops for administrators to make them aware of the problem of burnout and to suggest strategies for coping or job restructuring. (KC)

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SUMMARY OF RESEARCH

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION

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BURNOUT AND ASSOCIATED FACTORS AMONG ADMINISTRATORS/MID-MANAGERS OF THE COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE IN THE NORTH CENTRAL REGION

Richard Warner Clark and Keith L. Smith

BURNOUT AND ASSOCIATED FACTORS AMONG ADMINISTRATORS/ MID-MANAGERS OF THE COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE IN THE NORTH CENTRAL REGION

INTRODUCTION

Over the past ten years there has been an explosion of research and inquiry into the burnout phenomenon. Freudenberger (1983) stated that, "The rapidity with which the term and concept of burnout have been incorporated into the daily argot of our society is astonishing. Over the last few years, burnout has become a "buzzword" used to convey an almost unlimited variety of social and personal problems" (p.23).

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But burnout has become more than just a hot topic. Burnout has become a serious issue that affects millions of workers (Farber, 1983). These burned out workers were, "characterized by physical depletion, by feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, by emotional drain, and by the development of negative self-concept and negative attitudes toward work life, and other people" (Pines and Aronson, 1981, p. 15). Farber (1983) stated that:

> Burned out professionals are more frequently absent or late for work than their non-burned out colleagues; they become noticeably less idealistic and more rigid; their performance at work deteriorates markedly; and they may fantasize or actually plan on leaving the profession (p. 3).

Time magazine has indicated that the loss to organizations due to employee burnout is 50-70 billion dollars a year, which is approximately 750 dollars for every worker (Wallis, 1983).

Burnout has been most prevalent among workers in the helping professions. Studies have shown that these individuals suffer from high stress levels (Freudenberger, 1974, 1981; Freudenberger & Richelson, 1980; Maslach, 1976; Pines & Maslach, 1978). Low job satisfaction was also a problem (Freudenberger, 1975; Maslach, 1976).

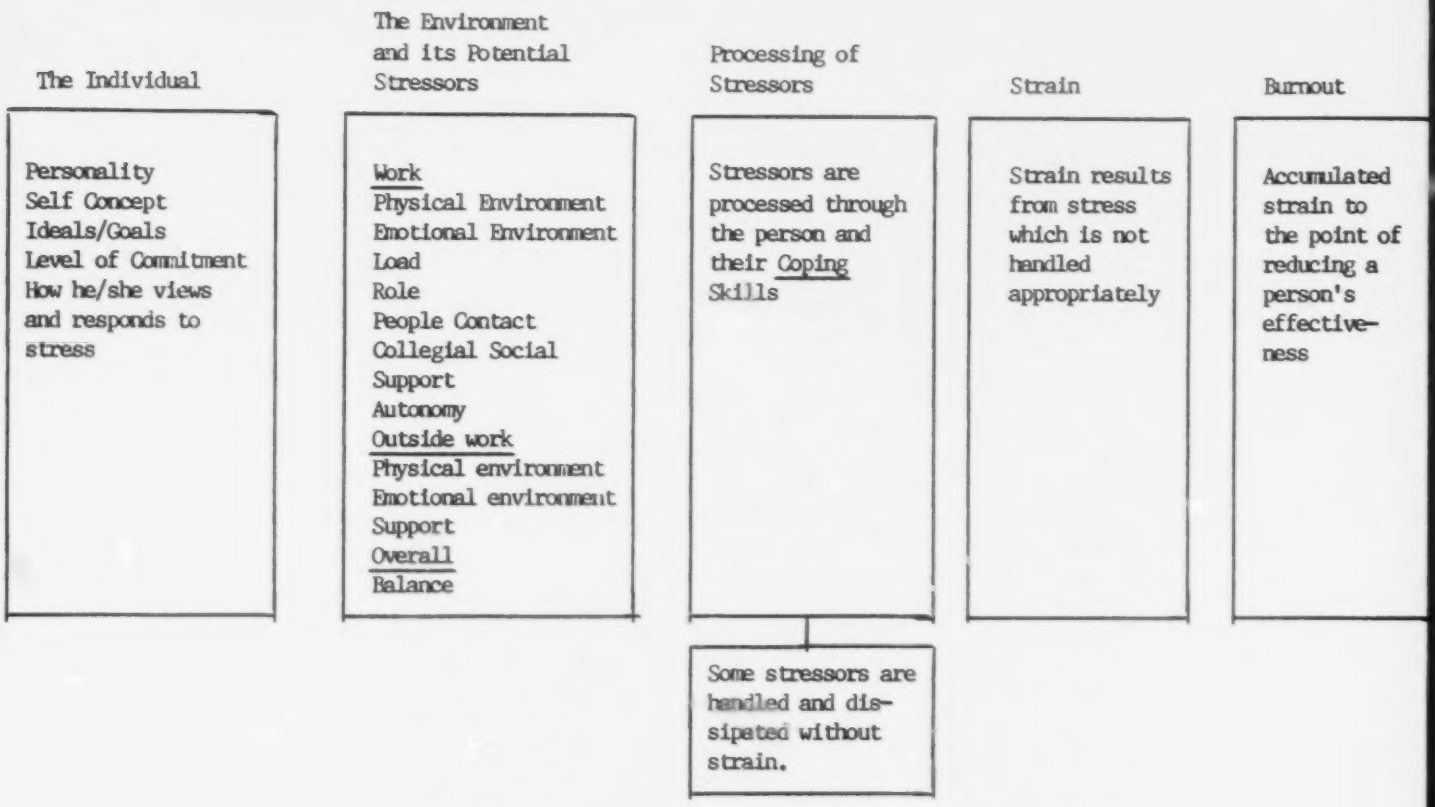
Model of Burnout

Based on research on the burnout syndrome, Newcomb (1985) developed a model which summarizes the burnout process (Figure 1). The model depicted the factors associated with burnout and indicated how the factors interrelate.

Burnout was an individual phenomenon. Each individual brought to a job situation his/her own personality, self-concept, goals, ideals, and level of commitment. The individual also had his/her own unique view of how stress affects the individual. This stress may be the result of the physical environment, emotional tensions, work load, the work role, people contact, or lack of collegial or social support. The individual must then process this stress and utilize some type of coping mechanism to dissipate the stress. Those stresses that were handled correctly ceased to be problematic. However, unresolved stress progressed into strain. The accumulation of strain eventually lead to a reduction of individual effectiveness and ultimately burnout.

This model, which effectively ties together the major factors associated with burnout, was used as the basis for this study of extension administrators. The model focused on the individual, the work environment and its stressors, strain, and burnout.

Figure 1. Model of burnout.



Both high stress and low job satisfaction have been highly associated with burnout in the studies cited. Brookins (1982) and Cooper and Marshall (1980) found that administrators also experience high stress and low job satisfaction. Cooper and Marshall (1980) indicated that administrators reported that, "70% of their total life stress resulted from their jobs" (p. 77). This high stress level, coupled with low job satisfaction, place administrators as prime candidates for burnout.

Burnout in Extension

Only one study of burnout was found relating directly to extension. A study by Igodan (1984), of Ohio Extension Agents, found approximately 12 percent of the agents in the high burnout category.

If extension agents experienced this level of burnout, one must wonder if extension administrators were also experiencing burnout. The literature has not previously addressed the problem of burnout, its associated factors, and the extent to which it exists among extension administrators.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the study were to: (1) determine the level of burnout, job satisfaction, personal strain, occupational stress, and personal coping resources of Associate Directors, Assistant Directors, and District Supervisors of the Cooperative Extension Service in the North Central Region, (2) determine the extent of association between burnout and personal characteristics, job satisfaction, personal strain, occupational stress and personal coping, (3) determine if differences in levels of burnout existed among Associate Directors, Assistant Directors, and District Supervisors.

METHODOLOGY

Population

The population for this study consisted of Associate Directors (N=19), Assistant Directors (N=36), and District Supervisors (N=67) in the Cooperative Extension Service located in the North Central Region. The North Central Region consisted of the following states: Illinois, Iowa; Indiana; Kansas; Michigan; Minnesota; Missouri, North Dakota; Ohio; South Dakota; and Wisconsin. Nebraska declined to participate in the study and was not included. Due to the small number of individuals in the population, a census was used for this study.

Design

Descriptive-correlational research was used in this study to obtain the data necessary to answer the research questions. The study was designed to investigate the following variables:

I. Independent Variables

- a. Job Satisfaction
- b. Occupational Stress
  - 1. Role overload
  - 2. Role insufficiency
  - 3. Role ambiguity
  - 4. Role boundary
  - 5. Responsibility
- c. Personal Strain
  - 1. Vocational strain
  - 2. Psychological strain
  - 3. Interpersonal strain
  - 4. Physical strain
- d. Personal Coping Resources
  - 1. Recreation
  - 2. Social support
  - 3. Rational/cognitive coping
- e. Demographic Variables:
  - 1. Age
  - 2. Marital status
  - 3. Sex
  - 4. Number of children
  - 5. Number of years in present position

II. Dependent Variable

a. Burnout Emotional Exhaustion (Frequency and Intensity)

b. Depersonalization (Frequency and Intensity)

c. Personal Accomplishment (Frequency and Intensity)

DATA COLLECTION

Data were collected by means of a mailed questionnaire to all individuals in the population. The first and second mailings of the questionnaire were sent in May, 1985. A 100 percent response rate was obtained.

MAJOR FINDINGS

The following were the major findings of the study:

Demographics

The mean age for the overall population was 48.39 years. Approximately 80 percent of the administrators/mid-managers were married. Ninety-seven individuals were male (79.5 percent) and twenty were female (20.5 percent). The majority of the individuals had children (86.1 percent). The majority of the administrators/mid-managers (52.5 percent) had less than five years of experience in the present job. Associate Directors had the least amount of tenure in the present position (3.68 years) as compared to Assistant Directors (6.50 years) and District Supervisors (8.51 years).

Job Satisfaction

The majority of individuals (96.7 percent) indicated that they either agreed or strongly agreed with those items indicating satisfaction with the job. Individuals in three job positions indicated approximately the same level of satisfaction.

Occupational Stress

The majority of the individuals in each job position scored in the two lower quartiles, indicating medium to low levels of occupational stress. Scores on the occupational stress subscales indicated that role

insufficiency, role ambiguity, and role boundary were not problems for administrators. Role overload and responsibility constituted the largest portion of occupational stress. Assistant Directors indicated the highest level of overload. Associate Directors indicated the highest pressures due to being responsible for others.

Personal Strain

Personal strain did not appear to be a problem for administrators/mid-managers. The majority of individuals were in the two lower quartiles which indicated fairly low levels of personal strain. Assistant Directors had the highest level of personal strain followed by Associate Directors and District Supervisors.

Personal Coping

Associate Directors indicated the highest level of coping resources to deal with stress followed by District Supervisors and Assistant Directors. The majority of individuals scored in the highest two quartiles, indicating good usage of personal coping resources. Recreation as a coping resource was low for all three groups while all three groups indicated high levels of social support.

Burnout

The majority of administrators/mid-managers were found to experience low to moderate levels of burnout as measured by the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). Percentages of individuals scoring in the high burnout category ranged from approximately 12 percent to 34 percent depending on the subscale.

An analysis of the three burnout subscales revealed the following findings. Approximately nineteen percent of the Assistant Directors and twenty-one percent of the District Supervisors had high levels of emotional exhaustion. Associate Directors indicated the highest levels of depersonalization (31.6 percent). The majority of administrators were in the low burnout category when looking at personal accomplishment. Assistant Directors indicated the highest percentage (19.4 percent) of burnout as related to personal accomplishment (Table 1).

Relationship of Burnout to Selected Variables

Moderate to substantial relationships were found between job satisfaction, occupational stress, personal strain, personal coping and burnout (emotional exhaustion and depersonalization). Slightly lower relationships were found between these variables and the burnout subscales related to personal accomplishment (Table 2).

Table 1

Level of Burnout of Extension Administrators/Mid-Managers in the North Central Region N = 122

Burnout Subscale	Level of Burnout	Associate Director N	Associate Director %	Assistant Director N	Assistant Director %	District Supervisor N	District Supervisor %
Emotional	H	2	10.5	7	19.4	14	20.9
Exhaustion	M	9	47.4	16	44.5	19	28.4
Frequency	L	8	42.1	13	36.1	34	50.7
Emotional	H	0	0.0	8	22.2	12	17.9
Exhaustion	M	12	63.2	13	36.1	29	43.3
Intensity	L	7	36.8	15	41.7	26	38.8
Depersonalization	H	6	31.6	5	13.9	10	14.9
Frequency	M	4	21.0	13	36.1	25	37.3
	L	9	47.4	18	50.0	32	47.8
Depersonalization	H	5	26.3	12	33.3	25	37.3
Intensity	M	8	42.1	13	26.1	22	32.8
	L	6	31.6	11	30.6	20	29.9
Personal	H	0	0.0	7	19.4	8	11.9
Accomplishment	M	3	15.8	6	16.7	7	10.5
Frequency	L	16	84.2	33	63.9	52	77.6
Personal	H	3	15.8	11	30.6	18	26.9
Accomplishment	M	8	42.1	13	36.1	20	29.8
Intensity	L	8	42.1	12	33.3	29	43.3

Table 2

The Relationships Among Burnout Subscales and Job Satisfaction, Occupational Stress, Personal Strain, and Personal coping N=122

Burnout Subscale	Job Satisfaction	Occupational Stress	Personal Strain	Personal Coping
EEF	-.32	.52	.71	-.46
EEI	-.25	.35	.48	-.30
DPF	-.35	.59	.58	-.38
DPI	-.16	.34	.33	-.28
PAI	.29	-.11	-.22	.34
PAF	.15	-.03	-.12	.35

Relationship Among Job Satisfaction, Occupational Stress, Personal Strain and Personal Coping

Moderate to substantial relationships were found among the independent variables. As job satisfaction tended to increase, the amount of occupational stress and personal strain decreased. The higher the occupational stress; the higher the personal strain and the lower the amount of usage of personal coping techniques (Table 3).

Table 3

Relationships Among Job Satisfaction, Occupational Stress, Personal Strain, and Personal Coping

Variables	Job Satisfaction	Occupational Stress	Personal Strain	Personal Coping
Job Satisfaction	1.00			
Occupational Stress	-.44	1.00		
Personal Strain	-.44	.63	1.00	
Personal Coping	.32	-.42	-.62	1.00

CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions were based on the interpretation of data presented in the study:

1. Administrators/mid-managers who experienced higher levels of occupational stress tended to have higher levels of personal strain. Administrators/mid-managers who had high usage of personal coping strategies tended to have lower levels of stress and strain and ultimately less burnout. High occupational stress was substantially related to high levels of personal strain and ultimately burnout.

2. Approximately one fifth of the administrators/mid-managers experienced high levels of burnout which demand attention. District Supervisors and Assistant Directors had approximately the same level of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. Time pressures and role overload appear to be a contributor to this problem. The extent of burnout is sufficient to suspect that individuals may be attempting to handle too many tasks and that additional personnel support or reduced job responsibilities may alleviate this problem.

3. Approximately one third of the Associate Directors scored high in the depersonalization category of burnout. These individuals tended to treat individuals in a callous style and distanced themselves from other individuals. The opinion of the researcher is that this may be due to the nature of the job. The position requires much time doing paperwork, budgeting and reporting, while there appears to be less people contact.

4. The demographic variables of age, number of children and years in the present position had little relationship with the level of burnout among administrators/mid-managers. No significant differences in burnout scores were found due to sex of the individual or marital status.

5. The majority of administrators were satisfied with their jobs.

6. The more satisfied the administrator/mid-manager, the lower the level of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization and the higher the feelings of personal accomplishment. Stresses and strains that could lead to emotional exhaustion or depersonalization could be viewed as challenges which keep the job interesting and satisfying. This seemed to be supported by the data which indicated higher job satisfaction was associated with lower levels of personal strain and lower levels of occupational stress.

7. The majority of administrators had low levels of occupational stress. As the amount of role overload increased, the amount of burnout

among administrators/mid-managers also tended to increase. Of the three job positions, Assistant Directors experienced the largest percentage of role overload. The opinion of the researcher is that those individuals have statewide program responsibility in a given subject matter area yet have very little personal assistance. Job demands for program support from Extension agents and accountability demands from top administrators may be placing too many job duties on one individual. This overload may lead to emotional exhaustion which in turn may contribute to burnout.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were suggested by the researcher based on the findings of this study.

1. District Supervisors, Assistant Directors, Associate Directors and Directors of the Cooperative Extension Service should be made aware of the problems associated with burnout. This should be done through seminars, workshops or meetings which include managing time, communicating, planning leisure time, reducing stress, controlling personal feelings, and recognition of burnout symptoms. Support systems should be established to assist in coping with burnout.

2. A job analysis should be conducted for the positions of District Supervisor, Assistant Director and Associate Director. This job analysis should be examined to determine duties of the job which may lead to stress or strain. Individual and organizational strategies should then be developed to help reduce potential stressors. Consideration should be given to reduced work loads for District Supervisors and Assistant Directors.

3. Special workshops should be conducted for administrators/mid-managers and particularly Associate Directors to help them overcome their callous feelings toward individuals. These workshops should include sessions on sensitivity, perception and communication.

4. This study should be replicated for Extension Directors. These leaders must be effective in their jobs. This study would highlight potential problem areas and allow for corrective action.

5. This study should be replicated in other regions of the United States to determine if organizational changes might decrease occupational stress and strain and, thus, burnout. Particular attention should be paid to policies relating to sabatical leave, vacation time, and the opportunity for job rotation.

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SUMMARY OF RESEARCH SERIES

Job related stress is receiving increasing attention in the workplace. Managers are learning about the phenomenon of burnout. If managers in the Cooperative Extension Service are to make informed decisions about personnel issues, they must be aware of the nature and extent of the problem. This study provides information that will enhance the awareness of the reader about burnout. The findings may be helpful to extension administrators desiring to redefine position responsibilities and managerial style.

This summary is based on a Doctor of Philosophy thesis by Richard Warner Clark, under the direction of Keith L. Smith. Dr. Clark is an Assistant Professor, Department of Agricultural Education, The Ohio State University. Dr. Keith Smith is an Associate Professor, in the Department of Agricultural Education, and the Ohio Cooperative Extension Service, The Ohio State University. Special appreciation is due Dr. Clarence A.Cunningham, Associate Director, Ohio Cooperative Extension Service,The Ohio State University; Dr. Steve Scheneman, Virginia Cooperative Extension Service, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University; and Dr. Donald Priebe, Professor and Chairman, Department of Agricultural Education, North Dakota State University for their critical review of this manuscript prior to its publication.

Research has been an important function of the Department of Agricultural Education since it was established in 1917. Research conducted by the Department has generally been in the form of graduate theses, staff studies and funded research. It is the purpose of this series to make useful knowledge from such research available to practitioners in the profession. Individuals desiring additional information on this topic should examine the references cited.

J. David McCracken, Professor
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